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ABSTRACT

The reading progress of disadvantaged urban Negro children was investigated over a 3-year period in the Comparing Approaches in First-Grade Teaching with Disadvantaged Children (CRAFT) Project in New York City. Reading was taught by two basic approaches, skills centered and language experience. The former included a basal reader method and a phonovisual method (basal reader and a phonics program). The language experience approach included two variants, a regular language experience method and a language experience audiovisual method. In the original study, 1,141 pupils participated through the first grade, 656 through the second grade, and 1,128 through the third grade. In a replication study 680 pupils participated through the first grade and 402 through the second grade. No third graders were included. The class was used as the statistical unit when appropriate. Significance of difference was tested by analysis of variance and by t-tests. The major finding was that differences in class mean reading scores within each method were much larger than differences between means for the approaches and the methods. Residual effects of the study, recommendations for the future, and references are included. (WB)

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The CRAFT Project: Final Report of a Three-Year Project on Teaching Reading to Disadvantaged Urban Negro Children

by

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The CRAFT Project: Final Report of a Three-Year Project on Teaching Reading to Disadvantaged Urban Negro Children*

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(For presentation at the 1968 International Reading Association Convention Proceedings, Research Session, 10:30 A.M., April 26, 1968, Boston, Massachusetts)

The CRAFT Project (Comparing Reading Approaches in First-Grade Teaching with Disadvantaged Children) investigated the progress of reading of disadvantaged urban Negro children. Students were taught to read by two basic approaches, Skills-Centered and Language Experience. The Skills-Centered Approach included two methods, a Basal Reader Method, using conventional basal readers, and a Phonovisual Method, which combined use of basal readers with the Phonovisual system of teaching components of phonic analysis. The Language Experience Approach also had two variants, a regular Language Experience Method in which reading materials were developed from the experiences and verbalizations of children, and developed gradually into individualized reading, and a Language Experience Audio-Visual Method in which several types of audio-visual supplementation were provided.

The project consisted of an Original Study which extended from grade one through grade three, and a Replication Study conducted in grades one and two.

In the Original Study 1,141 children participated through the first grade, 656 children through the second grade, and 1,128 were located in the third grade follow-up. In the Replication Study 680 children participated through the first year, and 402 through the second grade.

Statistical treatment was carried out using the class as a unit when appropriate. Means and standard deviations were obtained for raw scores on test data; for scores adjusted on the basis of first grade pretests, and for scores adjusted on the basis of the posttests of the preceding grade. Grade equivalents were also obtained. Significance of difference was tested by analysis of variance and, when appropriate, by t-tests. In addition a large number of variables were correlated with adjusted outcome measures.

Results

1. The main finding which held for all five years, was that differences in class mean reading scores within each method were much larger than differences between the means for the approaches and the methods. As a result

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there were no significant differences between the Skills-Centered Approach and the Language Experience Approach or between the methods which comprised the approaches.

2. During the first and second grades, in both the original and replication studies, classes using the Skills-Centered Approach had slightly higher means than those using the Language Experience Approach. This pattern was reversed by the end of the third grade but at none of the grade levels were the differences significant.

3. Differences between results of the Basal Reader and Phonovisual Methods were generally small and non-significant. Similarly, differences between the Language Experience and Language Experience Audio-Visual Methods were not significant.

4. In the first CRAFT year it was evident that three of the methods, Basal, Language Experience, and Audio-Visual produced relatively good results when their distinctive features were given added time. This was not true, however, of the Phonovisual Method, and in the second grade a negative correlation existed for that method between the amount of time spent on the teaching of phonics and reading achievement.

5. At the start of the first grade girls tended to have slightly higher means on some readiness tests and boys on others. Achievement differences in favor of girls tended to increase during the second and third grades, and were substantial by the end of third grade. The differences favoring girls were largest in the Language Experience and Phonovisual Methods and small or non-existent in the Basal and Audio-Visual Methods. This linking of differences in achievement with teaching methods strongly suggests that, for this population, the advantage held by girls is a result of environmental conditions within the school rather than biological differences between the sexes.

6. Kindergarten children had consistently higher scores than non-kindergarten children on the first grade pretests and on all sets of posttests. Differences were quite small in the first grade, but tended to increase through the third grade. In the Original Study the advantage for kindergarten children was greatest for those in the Language Experience Approach at the end of the third grade. However, in the Replication Study the kindergarten children in the Skills-Centered classes showed greater advantages at the end of the study.

7. Children who were identified by their teachers as being early readers at the beginning of the first grade surpassed the total population on the pretests and on all sets of posttests. By the end of third grade these children increased their advantage over other children and scored well above grade norms on all reading tests. The progress of this group suggests that an early start in reading may be beneficial to disadvantaged children who are initially high in readiness tests, or who, in the opinion of their teachers, possess some ability to read.

8. In the schools where the CRAFT Project was undertaken the third grade median grade scores obtained during the experiment were higher than the

comparable median scores for the same schools just prior to the study, by 4.5 months in comprehension. The posttests of the second grade replication showed that the children in the Skills-Centered Approach had mean grade scores as the norm in Reading and Word Discrimination, an unusual result with disadvantaged children.

9. Many variables were shown not to have interfered with the comparison of approaches and methods, either by having non-significant correlations with reading results, or by being evenly balanced among the teaching methods. The variables checked included pupil age, absence, and readiness scores; teacher age, marital status, education, years of experience, rated competence, ethnic similarity to or difference from the pupils; and, adult education and income in the neighborhood.

10. Pupil attitude toward reading was essentially similar in all methods after the first year. The method of instruction to which the children were exposed apparently did not differentially affect related components of pupil achievement such as eagerness to read, the maturity of the child's choice of reading material, or the number of books read.

11. The Teacher Observation scale used in the study indicated that frequent efforts to maintain discipline were associated with relatively poor achievement. There was a trend suggesting that emphasizing praise and avoiding scolding is associated with good results in the Language Experience Approach, but not in the Skills-Centered Approach.

12. Records of use of time kept by the teachers on a Daily Log form showed a significant correlation between total reading time and achievement in first grade. This information was given to the teachers, with repeated requests that they adhere to the time schedule, and in subsequent years the correlation was non-significant. In second grade there was a tendency for the Skills-Centered teachers who utilized a wide variety of reading activities to achieve better results than those who did not go beyond the prescribed skills program.

13. A fifth instructional method, called the Pilot Method, was added in the Replication Study. It combined Phonovisual phonics with the Language Experience Audio-Visual Method. Teachers using it did not do better than they had done with one of the two components.

Residual Effects of the Study

In addition to the results of the study just reported information about the residual effects of the study are currently being obtained by interviews. Preliminary results of this supplementary study include the following:

1. None of the classroom teachers who participated in the study are now using the teaching method exactly as they had while the study was in progress.

2. Major modifications have been made by most of the teachers who participated in the Language Experience Approach. Almost all of them now use

the basal reader as the major tool of instruction and supplement this instruction with components of the Language Experience Approach, including considerable reliance on the use of the child's oral language to develop reading materials. These teachers felt they could not present an adequate skills development program based exclusively on the children's oral language and experiences. Teachers complained that instructing children through exclusive use of language experience lacked structure, an instructional characteristic which they felt was necessary for teaching culturally disadvantaged children.

3. Teachers in the Skills-Centered Approach have made smaller modifications in their teaching methodology. While still using the basal reader as the basic tool of instruction, with or without supplementary phonics, they have now added elements of the Language Experience Approach. In other words, it appears that all teachers who participated in this study are now using elements of both the Skills-Centered and Language Experience Approaches rather than the "pure" form of either one.

4. Irrespective of the method by which they taught, teachers expressed the opinion that there is no one method by which all children will learn to read acceptably. Rather, they felt that teachers should attempt to determine the major strengths of a variety of reading methods and thereby develop their own mode of instruction.

5. Teachers in the Language Experience Approach agree that a year is not sufficient time to become comfortable and secure in teaching that approach. Most feel that a minimum of two years was necessary.

6. As a result of the CRAFT project many teachers feel that their teaching style has changed. This is particularly evident among teachers who were in the Language Experience Method. They feel that they are now more permissive in their dealings with children, less rigid in their teaching approach, and more creative in developing basic skills.

7. Most teachers believe that a strong relationship exists between a teacher's personality and the method she is successful in teaching. A minority of teachers contend that a teacher's attitude toward the method, rather than her personality, affects teaching success.

Recommendations

1. The results of the study have indicated that the teacher is far more important than the method. Costly procedures such as smaller classes and provision of auxiliary personnel may continue to give disappointing results if teaching skills are not improved. It is recommended therefore, that in-service workshops and expert consultative help be provided for all teachers and especially for those with minimal experience.

2. The results of the study also suggest that a comparison of methods, at least those which rely exclusively on the components of one particular instructional approach, be abandoned. Rather it is recommended that efforts be made to try to determine which combination of instructional components will be most suitable in teaching disadvantaged children. Since

there were very large differences in achievement among the classes in each method, research to clarify the teacher behavior associated with optimal results is also recommended.

3. The results also suggest the desirability of modifying kindergarten programs for disadvantaged children where such programs are concerned mainly with fostering social and emotional growth. It is recommended that kindergarten programs include sequentially planned activities for the development of specific aspects of reading readiness. The results further suggest that children who show accelerated readiness may benefit from an earlier start in reading.

4. The excitement and motivation of being in an experimental study seems to have been in part responsible for the favorable results of the CRAFT research. It is possible that the continuing involvement of teachers in a program of studying and testing new materials and methods would be productive of improved results, regardless of the merits of the specific factors being studied.

5. CRAFT results have shown a significant relationship between teacher satisfaction with a method and her results with it, but do not provide a causal explanation. Further study is needed to clarify this important question. One possibility is that when teachers find that a method works they learn to like it, even if originally opposed to it. The alternative is that some teachers can do better with one kind of method and other teachers with a different method, so that method should be fitted to the teacher's characteristics. A research attack on this problem seems desirable.

6. The study reveals that boys coming from disadvantaged homes are similar in performance on readiness tasks to girls coming from the same environment, and that the subsequent content or style of teaching may be a major contributing factor in lower reading scores made by the boys. Further experimentation should be carried out to determine the most efficacious ways of instructing disadvantaged boys.

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